Did Shah Ismail Shaheed say it's better to think of an ox or donkey in Salah than Nabi ﷺ ?

Hazrat Maulana Shah Ismail Shaheed has been slandered by the Reza Khanis, who claim that Shah Sahib has written in "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" that: "To divert one's thought towards the Messenger of Allah ﷺ during prayer is worse than being deeply absorbed in the thought of one's ox or donkey, even worse than the thought of having intercourse with a prostitute." After quoting the Persian text of "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem", Ahmad Raza Khan Barelwi writes:

"Muslims! O Muslims! For God's sake, look at these impure, accursed, satanic statements! To divert one's thought during prayer towards Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, is a higher darkness, whereas thinking of a prostitute and thinking of having intercourse with her is better than that, and being completely absorbed in the thought of one's ox or donkey is far better than that. Yes, look at how the respect for a prostitute and a donkey did not allow any internal shock to reach his heart, but the lower status he gave to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is evident from the fact that he did not feel any shame while writing this in a book like the Great Qur'an. Why shouldn't a fire rage in the hearts due to their thought, why shouldn't a tremor occur in the hearts? For God's sake, O Muslims! Look with justice! Can such a statement ever come out of any Islamic tongue? Far be it from Allah! (Al-Kawkabat us-Shahabiya, pp. 29–30)"

Important things to note:

First, a few things are presented as an introduction, after which the meaning of the passage from "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" will be explained, and the mentioned slander will be answered.

(1) "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" is originally in Persian, and it is not the authored composition of Hazrat Maulana Shah Ismail Shaheed; rather, it is a collection of the *Malfuzat* (discourses) of his spiritual mentor, Hazrat Syed Ahmad Shaheed Sahib Rai Barelvi, which Shah Ismail Shaheed compiled. Therefore, Shah Sahib is not its author, but rather its compiler and editor. The clarification of this is present in the introduction of the book.
(2) In "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem," not all the discourses are of Hazrat Syed Ahmad Shaheed compiled by Maulana Shah Ismail Shaheed; rather, some of them are discourses collected by Maulana Abdul Hai Sahib, the son-in-law of Shah Abdul Aziz Muhaddith Dehlvi. At the time of compilation, Shah Sahib included them as they were in the second and third chapters. The clarification of this is present in the original book.
(3) The text of "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" upon which the baseless accusation against Shah Ismail Shaheed is made begins on page 43 of the Persian edition and ends on page 103. Therefore, it is possible that this text of the second chapter is the one that Hazrat Maulana Abdul Hai Sahib had penned down. In such a case, attributing it with absolute certainty to Shah Ismail Shaheed and including this text definitively among the writings of Shah Ismail Shaheed is an absolute injustice. If there is anything objectionable in this text, then first, Hazrat Syed Ahmad Shaheed Sahib Rai Barelvi should be declared a disbeliever (Kafir) because these are his discourses; and if due to being the compiler, someone is to be declared a disbeliever, then there is also the possibility of Hazrat Maulana Abdul Hai Sahib being a disbeliever, as perhaps he

collected these pages. However, the innovators (Ahl-e-Bid'at) usually label only Hazrat Maulana Ismail Shaheed as a disbeliever because of this text - this is a strange matter for anyone to ponder.
(4) In some paths of Sufism, there is a practiced method for training the seeker, which is called *Tasavvur-e-Sheikh* (visualization of the spiritual guide). This is a specific terminology of the Sufis, the reality of which is that the seeker is instructed to focus their attention on the Sheikh while maintaining full reverence and respect during meditation. That is, they should empty their heart of all thoughts and establish the image of the Sheikh in their heart, directing their focus toward it as if the Sheikh is present. And sometimes, they are instructed that in the same manner, during meditation, the seeker should visualize the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and empty their heart of all types of thoughts and distractions, fixing their focus on the image of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ until a complete state of single-mindedness and concentration is achieved in that moment. This is also called *Shaghl-e-Barzakh* (the occupation of the intermediate state) in Sufi terminology, and it has been explained in "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" itself.

Benefit: Among the innovations of the modernists, there is also *Shaghl-e-Barzakh*, which has become famous among most of the later scholars and the method of the mentioned practice is that to remove distractions and achieve concentration of the mind, they manifest the image of the Sheikh with complete determination and respect, and they direct themselves toward this form with all their might and respect, as if they are sitting before the Sheikh with utmost respect, and they direct their heart towards him. (Sirat-e-Mustaqeem Translated, pp. 133 - 135 / Sirat-e-Mustaqeem Persian, p. 118)

(5) In Persian idiom, the phrase "Ox and Donkey" (*Gao o Khar*) is used to describe the materials of the world, as in the famous poem of Nizami:

بر زباں تسبیح و در دل گاؤ خر ✻ ایں چنیں تسبیح کے دارد اثر

Translation: Praise is on the tongue, but in the heart is the ox and donkey; what is the benefit of such praise?!

It is evident that in this poem, "Ox and Donkey" does not mean literally a donkey and an ox; rather, it refers to all those things that distract a human being from God. The meaning of "Ox and Donkey" is explained in "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" itself: "An ox and a donkey is an emblem; whatever is besides the Presence of the Truth, be it honored or degraded, light or dark." (Sirat-e-Mustaqeem, p. 85)

The Answer

After these introductory matters, it should be known that it is not written anywhere in "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" that bringing the thought of the Holy Prophet ﷺ into prayer is completely futile and worse than being absorbed in the thought of an ox or a donkey. Read the text of "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" carefully:

آرے بہ مقتضائے ظُلُمٰتٌ بَعْضُهَا فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ از وسوسۂ زنا خیالِ مجامعتِ زوجۂ خود بہتر است — وصرفِ ہمت بسوئے شیخ" وامثالِ آں از معظمین گو جنابِ رسالت مآب باشند چندیں مرتبہ بدتر از استغراق در صورتِ گاو و خرِ خود است کہ خیالِ آں بالتعظیم واجلال بسویدائے دلِ انسان می‌چسپد، بخلافِ خیالِ گاو و خر کہ نہ آں قدر چسپیدگی می‌بود ونہ تعظیم؛ بلکہ مہان ومحقر می‌بود و ایں تعظیم واجلالِ غیر کہ در نماز ملحوظ ومقصود می‌شود بشرک می‌کشد"۔ (صراطِ مستقیم، ص: ۸۶)

Translation: Beware! For by the requirement of "darknesses, one above another" (these are very dark thoughts), the thought of having intercourse with one's own wife is better - and solely directing one's determination toward the elders, whether it be the Presence of the Messenger ﷺ, is far worse than being deeply absorbed in the form of one's ox and donkey; because the thought of the Sheikh is accompanied by reverence and respect, it becomes deep-seated in the human heart, whereas the thought of an ox and a donkey does not have this degree of adherence (attachment and connection) or reverence. Rather, that thought is trivial and degraded, and this reverence and respect for someone other than God, when looked at and intended within prayer, is considered to lead toward shirk.

The meaning of this passage is that in prayer, to turn one's focus away from Allah, the Majestic, and to direct it toward anything else is forbidden; because prayer is meant for humility, submission, and focus toward the Creator. However, the states of different whispers and thoughts are not equal; rather, some whispers are worse than others. For example, the thought of intercourse with one's own wife is not as harmful as the thought of committing adultery. Similarly, during prayer, to intentionally direct one's determination toward one's Sheikh or any great figure, or the Messenger of Allah ﷺ - meaning to forcefully cast aside all thoughts that separate one from Allah, and then deliberately focus on the image of the Sheikh or the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and become absorbed in those thoughts - is worse than worldly whispers. This is because worldly thoughts and whispers do not come by choice; rather, they come on their own, and the worshiper has no interest or reverence for them, but rather their harmful nature remains apparent.

Therefore, whenever a worshiper gets such a thought, they remove those whispers from the heart, which creates focus toward Allah and humility. On the contrary, "solely directing determination" - wherein instead of focusing on Allah, one deliberately makes the Messenger of Allah ﷺ or the Sheikh the center of focus, and the thought of anyone other than Allah, the Majestic, is brought into the heart, and the visual form of the Messenger ﷺ or the Sheikh is revered and respected, and made the intended object - causes the worshiper to be deprived of Allah, and their reverence and respect, meaning the bowing, prostration, standing, etc, are drawn towards someone other than God. This reverence and respect leads a human being toward shirk; therefore, deliberately directing determination toward worldly whispers is far better. Understand this and ponder!

However, if during prayer, without intentionally directing determination, the thought of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ comes, or while reading *At-Tahiyyat* and *Durood Sharif*, the thought shifts toward the Holy Prophet ﷺ in such a way that no disruption occurs in the connection with Allah, then not only is the prayer valid, but it is more perfect.

It is stated in "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem" itself: "In this place, it is clear that if during the state of prayer, the unveiling of the spirits of angels, prophets, or saints takes place, then it is neither ugly nor reprehensible; rather, it is a magnificent and high-ranking reward from Allah, the Majestic, which is granted to specific servants." It is written in "Sirat-e-Mustaqeem":

نباید دانست که سنوح مسائلِ غریبه و کشفِ ارواح و ملائکه در نماز قبیح است؛ بلکه توجیهِ همّت و قصدِ این کار در طویّت و امتزاجِ این مدّعا در نیّت، مخالفِ خلوصِ مخلصان است، و اما سنوح و کشفِ مذکورین پس از قبیلِ خلعتهای فاخره است که مخلصانِ مستغرقِ حضورِ حق را بسببِ وفورِ عنایتها بآن می‌نوازند، پس در حقِّ ایشان کمالی است که در موطنِ مثال مجسّم گردیده، و نمازِ ایشان عبادتی‌ست که ثمره‌اش بمنظر رسیده". (صراط مستقیم، ص: ۸۵)

Translation: It should be understood that the coming and unveiling of difficult matters, or the spirits of angels, during prayer is not a defect; rather, to direct one's determination toward it and intend to bring them into presence is contrary to the sincerity of sincere people. And the coming of these matters into the heart on their own, or the unveiling of spirits and angels, is among those proud blessings with which those gentlemen who are absorbed in the Truth are honored due to the ultimate kindness of their Master. Therefore, in their regard, this is a perfection, and their prayer has materialized in the world of examples as an ultimate act of worship, the reflection of which has come before their eyes.

Taken from محاضراتِ علمیه برموضوع رضاخانیت